

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-04 L-03 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-04

RSC-01 USIA-15 PRS-01 SPC-03 DRC-01 /061 W

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R 021020Z APR 74

FM AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2890

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE YAOUNDE 0979

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: BTRA

SUBJECT: THE TRAVELS OF "CASSIUS CLAY"

REF: STATE 059390

1. STRIKING PERHAPS SLIGHTLY CLOSER TO THE MARK THAN THEY THEMSELVES KNEW, RADIO CAMEROON CELEBRATED APRIL FOOL'S DAY HEREABOUTS WITH AN IMAGINATIVE NEWS REPORT OF THE ARRIVAL OF "CASSIUS CLAY" IN YAOUNDE TO BEGIN TRAINING HERE FOR HIS SEPTEMBER KINSHASA BOUT WITH FOREMAN. THEY BROKE THE STORY ON THE NOON FRENCH-LANGUAGE NEWS, AND EMBELLISHED IT IN THE FOLLOWING ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SEGMENT WITH A PHONY PLANE-SIDE INTERVIEW WITH THE PHANTOM PUGILIST. THE LATTER WAS A GIVEAWAY--AND DESIGNED TO BE SO, ACCORDING TO THE RADIO STAFF--BY (1) ITS POSITION FOLLOWING AN INTERVIEW IN TORTURED ENGLISH BY THE DIRECTOR OF THE FRENCH CULTURAL CENTER ON THE ORIGINS OF "POISSON D'AVRIL" AND (2) CASSIUS CLAY'S CURIOUSLY AFRICAN ACCENT. ANOTHER PART OF THE GIMMICK WAS THE STATION'S OFFER OF 50 FREE TICKETS TO THE FIRST EXHIBITION BOUT IN YAOUNDE--WHICH, AS CAN BE IMAGINED, PRODUCED A RAPID LINEUP OUTSIDE THE STUDIO. BUT THE EMBASSY/USIS HAD TO ADMIT--AND DID TO THE RADIO STAFF-- THAT THEY HAD US SWEATING FOR A FEW MINUTES.

2. THIS APRIL 1ST JOKE FOLLOWED THE APPEARANCE SATURDAY IN THE DOUALA-BASED DAILY "LA PRESSE DU CAMEROUN" OF A SPECULATIVE STORY INTRODUCING THE POSSIBILITY THAT CLAY MIGHT VISIT CAMEROON

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EN ROUTE TO KINSHASA. A VISIT "OF SUCH A DISTINGUISHED GUEST IS

ALWAYS A GOOD THING AND INDEED A GREAT HONOR," OBSERVED CAMEROON'S ONLY DAILY. "IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT CAMEROON HAS NEVER HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE A PERFORMANCE OF THE OTHER SPORTS STAR WHO IS A KING, PELE, SIMPLY BECAUSE THE CAMEROONIAN FOOTBALL AUTHORITIES DIDN'T SATISFY THE CONDITIONS IMPOSED BY THE BRAZILIAN SPORTS DIRECTORS, CONDITIONS WHICH, IT MUST BE SAID, WERE NOT EXCESSIVE. IN THIS CASE...WE BELIEVE THERE IS NO OCCASION TO HESITATE, BECAUSE ANY FINANCIAL REQUIREMENT FOR SUCH AN OPERATION COULD NOT FAIL TO BE PROFITABLE."

3. BOTH OF THESE REACTIONS TO THE THOUGHT OF GREETING ALI ON CAMEROONIAN SOIL APPEAR TO CONFIRM OUR EVALUATION THAT THE UPCOMING PLANNED EXHIBITION BOUT BY MUHAMMED ALI WILL BE ENTHUSIASTICALLY WELCOMED HERE.
MOORE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 02 APR 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: MorefiRH
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974YAOUND00979
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740072-1128
From: YAOUNDE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740472/aaaacota.tel
Line Count: 76
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: STATE 059390
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: MorefiRH
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 AUG 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <27 AUG 2002 by rowelle0>; APPROVED <10-Sep-2002 by MorefiRH>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: THE TRAVELS OF "CASSIUS CLAY"
TAGS: BTRA
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005